

CENSORING HUXLEY AND WILBERFORCE: A NEW SOURCE FOR THE  
MEETING THAT THE *ATHENAEUM* ‘WISELY SOFTENED DOWN’

by

RICHARD ENGLAND\*

*Pine Honors College, Eastern Illinois University, 600 Lincoln Avenue, Charleston,  
IL 61920, USA*

In mid July 1860, the *Athenaeum* published a summary of the discussions about Charles Darwin’s theory that took place at the British Association meeting in Oxford. Its account omitted the famous exchange between Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford, and Thomas Huxley, the rising man of science. A fuller report of the meeting was published a week later in a local weekly, the *Oxford Chronicle*, but this has gone unnoticed by historians. The *Oxford Chronicle* supplies a new version of Wilberforce’s question to Huxley, with more material about religious objections to human evolution and the proper role of authority in popular scientific discussions. Excerpts from the *Athenaeum* and *Oxford Chronicle* accounts show that they likely had a common ancestor, and other sources corroborate details given only in the *Oxford Chronicle*. This discovery reveals that the *Athenaeum* narrative—until now the longest and best known—was censored to remove material that was considered objectionable. The *Oxford Chronicle* gives us a fuller story of what was said and how the audience reacted to the encounter between Huxley and Wilberforce.

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*Our Ancestors*—Mr Darwin, whose treatise on the development of species has been the book of the season, did not appear at the British Association. His place was well filled by Mr Huxley, who on Saturday had to do battle for the new doctrine. ‘If I may be allowed to inquire,’ said the Bishop of Oxford, ‘would you rather have had an ape for your grandfather or grandmother?’ ‘I would rather have had apes on both sides for my ancestors,’ replied the naturalist, ‘than human beings so warped by prejudice that they were afraid to behold the truth’.<sup>1</sup>

The encounter between Thomas Huxley and Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford, at the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) meeting in Oxford in 1860

\*rengland@eiu.edu

became famous in the late nineteenth century and has developed into an iconic touchstone of the conflict between science and religion in the wake of Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory. However, many historians have noted that the event seemed little noticed at the time.<sup>2</sup> In the *Athenaeum*'s semi-official account of the discussion there are summaries of the speeches that followed John Draper's talk on 'The Intellectual Development of Europe with reference to the views of Mr Darwin' on Saturday 30 June in Section D (Zoology), but there is no mention of the exchange between Darwin's episcopal detractor and his scientific defender; for that matter, there is no hint of any religious animus against Darwin's theory in the 2 200 word account.<sup>3</sup> The most common explanation for this curious omission is that the event was not particularly significant to the audience in 1860, and that it was only after it was enshrined in the *Life and letters of Charles Darwin* (1887) that it gained its iconic status. Revisionist views of the Huxley–Wilberforce debate have generally downplayed conflict and emphasized complexity. As the encounter took place in the context of a discussion, it was not a debate, and therefore there were no real winners or losers. The audience was divided, and the letters of those who were there record different opinions about who had the best arguments. Some have argued that Joseph Hooker gave a longer speech (according to the *Athenaeum*) and therefore may have been a more significant champion of Darwin than Huxley that day.<sup>4</sup>

However, other historians have noted the importance of the event to Huxley and Darwin's circle, and in a recent paper Nanna Kaalund finds that the exchange between Huxley and Wilberforce appeared in newspapers several times in an abbreviated form quite distinct from the fuller reports on the British Association meeting.<sup>5</sup> In his broad study of references to the event, Frank James shows that it was widely talked about: for instance, the geologist Charles Lyell, the parliamentarian Mountstuart Grant Duff, and the barrister Arthur Munby all referred to the gossip about the event in their diaries or private correspondence.<sup>6</sup> John Draper, whose address preceded the famous discussion, also heard that his Oxford contributions were 'talked about very much here in London'.<sup>7</sup> Given the apparent interest in the event, James has suggested another reason why it did not appear in the *Athenaeum*: its semi-official report was 'sanitised' by suppressing some aspects of the discussion. This was done, James argues, because the controversy offended the sensibilities of the gentlemen of science at the British Association. If this were the case, the lengthy, but censored *Athenaeum* account would be seen as definitive and 'render unnecessary' the production of other versions. He notes that, inasmuch as there were no subsequent printed accounts of the discussion, it was 'entirely successful'. The *Athenaeum* reports of the British Association were indeed widely reprinted, and its 14 July account has been viewed by historians as the most complete contemporary version of the Huxley–Wilberforce debate.

The *Athenaeum* was not entirely successful in superseding all other versions, however. On 21 July 1860 the *Oxford Chronicle and Berks and Bucks Gazette*, a liberal penny weekly, published a much more detailed account, which appears to be closer to the original, unexpurgated source used by the *Athenaeum*. This has not yet attracted historical attention. The *Oxford Chronicle* report includes all of the speeches that appear in the *Athenaeum*, but it is much longer, particularly in its reporting of the comments of Huxley and Wilberforce. It describes the famous question and response, setting them in the context of the discussion as a whole, and it also includes a follow-up exchange between Wilberforce and Huxley that focuses on the question of scientific authority. Its inclusion

of details about audience reactions also gives us a much better sense of the agency of the crowd in responding to and shaping the discussion that day. The *Oxford Chronicle* report casts new light on the encounter between Huxley and Wilberforce and on contemporary reactions to Darwin's theory. Its existence also confirms the view that the *Athenaeum* account is a censored version of the events, intended to suppress the sharpness of the conflict between champions of science and faith.

This paper will provide a brief comparison between the *Oxford Chronicle* and *Athenaeum* reports of the British Association meeting, and explain their likely relationship. While articles of this nature were not signed, we can guess who might have written them and why, although archival research would be needed to strengthen any hypotheses about the motives for publishing the different versions. This new source for the Huxley–Wilberforce debate plays up the element of conflict between science and religion that some historians of the event have minimized. However, it also confirms the arguments made by Frank James and others that questions of scientific authority and codes of polite behaviour were at least as important to this conflict as concerns about the implications of Darwin's theory. Concerns about decorum and public personal attacks also likely explain the history of how the debate appeared in these weekly papers.

#### THE ACCOUNT

Historical studies of the Huxley–Wilberforce debate published around 1980 drew attention to the absence of its best known lines in the *Athenaeum* account. In 1988, J. Vernon Jensen published several other brief references to the event in contemporary newspapers (including *Jackson's Oxford Journal* and the *Press*). By 2005 Frank James had found several more contemporary newspaper accounts, which supplemented references to the debate in letters and diaries. More periodical sources have been found because of the industry of scholars and because of the increasing digitization of nineteenth-century periodical and newspaper archives, as Kaalund's recent study makes clear. As more newspapers from the summer of 1860 have been discovered to record the exchange between Wilberforce and Huxley, the *Athenaeum*'s omission has seemed more a curiosity of its coverage, than (as earlier historians assumed) a reflection of what really happened.

The *Athenaeum* reported on the BAAS meeting in both its 7 July and 14 July 1860 editions. In the former it alludes to the debate in a leading section introducing the British Association meeting as a whole. That passage notes

the flash, and play and collisions in these Sections have been as interesting as the Battle at Farnborough or the Volunteer Review to the General British public. The Bishop of Oxford has been famous in these intellectual contests, but Dr Whewell, Lord Talbot de Malahide, Prof. Sedgwick, Mr Crawford and Prof. Huxley have each found foemen worthy of their steel, and have made their charges and countercharges very much to their own satisfaction and the delight of their respective friends.<sup>8</sup>

This account noted Darwin's theory as the occasion of particular controversy, and described Wilberforce and Huxley as taking a leading part. It slyly concludes that some 'eminent naturalists ... have expressed their willingness to accept, for themselves as well as for their friends and enemies, all actual truths, even the last humiliating truth of a pedigree not registered in the Herald's College. The dispute has at least made

Oxford uncommonly lively during the week'.<sup>9</sup> The military metaphors in this passage strongly suggest that there had been significant conflict at the BAAS meeting. The first volunteer review of 20 000 citizen soldiers was held at Hyde Park in London on 23 June 1860. The 'battle at Farnborough' was a brutal, illegal prize fight between John Heenan and Tom Sayers on 17 April 1860: a wild, chaotic match that had ended without a clear winner as the police closed in.<sup>10</sup> These comparisons, couched in a sarcastic, amused tone, suggest something about the character of the battles at the British Association, although it is left to the reader to draw such conclusions. There is no direct reference in this overview to the particular discussions that are being characterized in this way.

The account in the *Athenaeum*'s next edition (14 July) is both more detailed and considerably more restrained. Among the many pages devoted to summarizing the discussions in the sections, there is a full account of the main speech given in Section D on 30 June (by the American chemist John Draper) as well as the discussion of Darwin's theory that followed it. Although this report is unusual in devoting more space to the discussion following the main address than is typical, it is otherwise similar in length and tone to other narratives of BAAS sections. The summaries of talks that appear in the official *Report of the Meeting* are identical with those that appear in the *Athenaeum*, and so were likely to have been contributed by the secretaries of the British Association sections, giving this influential periodical's reports a semi-official character. In the *Athenaeum* version, the contributions of several participants are summarized (including those of Wilberforce and Huxley), but there is no humour or reference to religion. This version was very widely reprinted, and has been considered the most complete contemporary report of the meeting.

A week later, a curiously similar story about the same section appeared in the *Oxford Chronicle and Berks and Bucks Gazette*, a local weekly with a liberal, anti-Tractarian bent. It introduced the article by indicating that 'a correspondent' had given them a 'succinct report of the animated and interesting discussion ... upon Professor Draper's paper bearing upon Mr Darwin's Theory of the Origin of Species, which was noticeable for a sharp passage of arms between Prof. Huxley and the Bishop of Oxford'.<sup>11</sup> This article includes the same speeches as those that appear in the *Athenaeum* account, but goes into much more detail in describing the discussion between Huxley and Wilberforce. The summary of the opening speech by Draper is essentially the same as that given in the *Athenaeum* with slight differences in punctuation and word choice that may be due to different editing practices in turning a common shorthand account into a printed copy. The final speech, by the botanist Joseph Hooker, is identical in both accounts, which suggests that either this part of the report was identical in the common ancestor of the two accounts or that the *Oxford Chronicle* copied the *Athenaeum* summary here. The *Oxford Chronicle* account adds that Hooker's speech was well received by the audience, and that the meeting was adjourned at its close.

The most remarkable difference between the two reports, however, comes in the description of the discussion, where the *Oxford Chronicle* provides twice as much detail. Given the importance of the similarities and differences in understanding the relationship between the two accounts, both are provided below, omitting the opening speech of Draper and the closing remarks of Hooker. Spaces are inserted where information is not given in the *Athenaeum*.

*Athenaeum*, 14 July 1860, pp. 64–65: Saturday session, Section D.—Zoology and botany, including physiology

The discussion was commenced by the

Rev. Mr. CRESSWELL, who denied that any parallel could be drawn between the intellectual progress of man and the physical development of the lower animals. So far from the author being correct with regard to the history of Greece, its masterpieces in literature—the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*—were produced during its national infancy. The theory of intellectual development proposed was directly opposed to the known facts of the history of man.

- Sir B. BRODIE stated, he could not subscribe to the hypothesis of Mr. Darwin. His primordial germ had not been demonstrated to have existed. Man had a power of self-consciousness—a principle differing from anything found in the material world, and he did not see how this could originate in lower organisms. This power of man was identical with the Divine Intelligence; and to suppose that this could originate with matter, involved the absurdity of supposing the source of Divine power dependent on the arrangement of matter. —

The BISHOP OF OXFORD stated that the Darwinian theory, when tried by the principles of inductive science, broke down. The facts brought forward did not warrant the theory. The permanence of specific forms was a fact confirmed by all observation.

The remains of animals, plants, and man found in those earliest records of the human race—the Egyptian catacombs,

all spoke of their identity with existing forms, and of the irresistible tendency of organized beings to assume an unalterable character.

*Oxford Chronicle and Berks and Bucks Gazette*, 21 July 1860, p. 3

- Professor HUXLEY, being called upon by the chairman, declined entering into the subject, alleging the undesirability of contesting a scientific subject involving nice shades of idea before a general audience, who could not be supposed to judge upon its merits.

The discussion was then commenced by the

Rev. R. GRESWELL, who denied that any parallel could be drawn between the intellectual progress of man, and the physical development of the lower animals. He disputed Professor Draper's references to the history of Greece. Was it not a fact that its masterpieces in literature, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, were produced during its national infancy. (Hear, hear.) The theory of intellectual development advanced, he considered, was directly opposed to the known facts of the history of man. (Applause.)

- Sir B. BRODIE, who on rising was very warmly received, said he could not subscribe to the hypothesis of Mr. Darwin. Where was the demonstration that his primordial germ had existed? Man had a power of self-consciousness—a principle differing from anything found in the material world, and he did not see how this could originate in lower organisms. Moreover this power of man, being identical with the Divine Intelligence, to suppose that it could originate with matter, involved the absurdity of supposing the source of Divine power was dependent on the arrangement of matter. (Loud cries of 'hear, hear,' and much applause.)
- The BISHOP OF OXFORD, on rising, was loudly cheered. Having briefly noticed Professor Draper's arguments, and ridiculed his comparison of the marble and table, he proceeded to say that he had given the theory advanced by Mr. Darwin his most careful and anxious consideration. The conclusion he had come to was, that when tried by the principles of inductive science, philosophy or logic, it entirely broke down. (Cheers.) And to come to facts, he maintained that those brought forward utterly failed to prove his theory. The permanence of specific forms was a fact confirmed by all observation, the few exceptions that existed being confined to a few cases in certain species of plants. Take, for instance, the remains of animals, plants, and man, found in those earliest records of the human race—the Egyptian catacombs. Now, anatomists tell us that even in mummies, 4,000 years old, there is not the slightest physiological difference as compared with the race now—(hear, hear)—and so it was with animals and plants. All spoke of their identity with existing forms, and of the irresistible tendency of organised beings to assume an unalterable character. (Applause.) Glancing at Professor Huxley's remarks, on the previous day, in a discussion with Professor Owen, the Bishop facetiously asked if he had any particular predilection for a monkey ancestry, and, if so, on which side – whether he would prefer an ape for his grandfather, and a woman for his grandmother, or a

The line between man and the lower animals was distinct: there was no tendency on the part of the lower animals to become the self-conscious intelligent being, man; or in man to degenerate and lose the high characteristics of his mind and intelligence. All experiments had failed to show any tendency in one animal to assume the form of the other. In the great case of the pigeons quoted by Mr. Darwin, he admitted that no sooner were these animals set free than they returned to their primitive type. Everywhere sterility attended hybridism, as was seen in the closely-allied forms of the horse and the ass.

Mr. Darwin's conclusions were an hypothesis, raised most unphilosophically to the dignity of a causal theory. He was glad to know that the greatest names in science were opposed to this theory, which he believed to be opposed to the interests of science and humanity.

— Prof. HUXLEY defended Mr. Darwin's theory from the charge of its being merely an hypothesis. He said, it was an explanation of phenomena in Natural History, as the undulating theory was of the phenomena of light. No one objected to that theory because an undulation of light had never been arrested and measured. Darwin's theory was an explanation of facts; and his book was full of new facts, all bearing on his theory.

Without asserting that every part of the theory had been confirmed, he maintained that it was the best explanation of the origin of species which had yet been offered.

With regard to the psychological distinction between man and animals; man himself was once a monad—a mere atom, and nobody could say at

man for his grandfather, and an ape for his grandmother. (Much laughter.) But to treat the subject seriously. (Hear, hear.) The line between man and the lower animals was distinct. There was no tendency on the part of the lower animals to become the self-conscious intelligent being, man; or in man to degenerate and lose the high characteristics of mind and intelligence.

All experiments failed to show any tendency in one animal to assume the form of the other. Even in the great case of the pigeons, quoted by Mr. Darwin, he admitted that no sooner were these animals set free, than they returned to their primitive type. (Hear, hear.) Everywhere sterility attended hybridism, as was seen in the closely-allied forms of the horse and the ass. Viewing the matter in another aspect, he did consider it a most degrading assumption—(hear, hear)—that man, who, in many respects, partook of the highest attributes of God—(hear, hear)—was a mere development of the lowest forms of creation. (Applause) He could scarcely trust himself to speak upon the subject, so indignant did he feel at the idea. He did not desire timidity in scientific investigation. (Hear, hear). Religion had nothing to fear. (Hear, hear.) But what he did protest against was the hasty adoption of unsound hypotheses and unproved assertions for the weighty realities of scientific truth. (Applause.) He did not believe that science and revelation were inimical to each other, but that what appeared irreconcilable in the present state of scientific knowledge would in the fullness of time be made manifest, and redound to the triumph of both. (Prolonged cheering.)

Professor HUXLEY followed. In reply to the Bishop's query he said that if the alternative were given him of being descended from a man conspicuous for his talents and eloquence, but who misused his gifts to ridicule the laborious investigators of science and obscure the light of scientific truth, or from the humble origin alluded to, he would far rather choose the latter than the former. (Oh, oh, and laughter and cheering.) He then defended Mr. Darwin's theory from the charge of being a mere hypothesis, and said it was an explanation of phenomena in natural history holding the same relation as the undulating theory to the phenomena of light. Did any one object to that theory because an undulation of light had never been arrested and measured? His charge against Mr. Darwin's opponents was that they did not attempt to bring forward any important fact against his theory. That theory was an explanation of facts the result of laborious research, and abounded in new facts bearing upon it. Without asserting that every part of the theory had been confirmed, he maintained that it was the best explanation of the origin of species which had yet been offered—(hear, hear)—and he did protest against this subject being dealt with by amateurs in science, and made the occasion of appeals to passion and feeling. (Applause.) With regard to the psychological distinction between man and animals, it must be remembered man himself was once a monad—a mere atom of matter—and who



what moment in the history of his development he became consciously intelligent. The question was not so much one of a transmutation or transition of species, as of the production of forms which became permanent.

Thus the short-legged sheep of America were not produced gradually, but originated in the birth of an original parent of the whole stock, which had been kept up by a rigid system of artificial selection.

could say at what moment of his development he became consciously intelligent. (Hear, hear.) The question was not so much one of a transmutation or transition of species as of the production of forms which became permanent. In the course of an argument to support this position, he instanced the short-legged sheep of America, which were not produced gradually, but originated in the birth of an original parent of the whole stock, which had been kept up by a rigid system of artificial selection. (The professor, on resuming his seat, was loudly applauded.)

The BISHOP of OXFORD again rose and was received with cheers and laughter. He said he regretted that Professor Huxley had taken umbrage at what he had said. He did not know that he had said anything which could possibly give offence to Mr. Darwin's greatest friends, and as for his query to Professor Huxley he had been tempted to it by the merriment of the audience, and it was merely a passing allusion. He ridiculed Professor Huxley's appeal to authority in connection with his remarks on amateurs in science. On which side lay the authority. Sir B. Brodie, Professor Owen, and other eminent men were opposed to it, and how the Professor could talk as he had done about authority he did not know. (Laughter and cheers.) The Bishop then noticed the Professor's concluding remarks, denying the cogency of the illustrations, and after experiencing some interruptions in his scientific dicta, sat down amid loud cheers.

Professor HUXLEY rose in answer to calls for him, and said he was sure the Bishop could have no desire to mislead, but he thought he had misapprehended his remarks upon authority. What he had deprecated was authority like the Bishop's, authority derived from a reputation acquired in another sphere. (Hear, hear, and laughter.)

Dr. BIRD, who announced himself as a statistician, asserted that he could prove Mr. Darwin's theory was unsound by statistics. (Murmurs.) By Mr. Darwin's theory he could prove anything. (Question) The learned doctor's remarks were cut short by the impatience of the audience.

Admiral FITZROY stated, as an old friend of Mr Darwin's, he deeply regretted the views he had put forth (loud cries of question). He denied Prof. Huxley's statement that Mr Darwin's work was a logical arrangement of facts, and was proceeding to theological considerations when the interruptions became so noisy that the chairman requested the gallant admiral to sit down.

Professor BEALE said, although he was quite unable to decide the question on one side or the other, he would just notice for Professor Huxley's consideration some of the difficulties which Mr. Darwin's theory had to deal with, and among others referred especially to those vital tendencies of allied species which seemed independent of all external agents. (Cheers.)

Mr. LUBBOCK reiterated Professor Huxley's assertion that Mr. Darwin's book was the most logical and

— Admiral FITZROY regretted the publication of Mr. Darwin's book, and denied Prof. Huxley's statement, that it was a logical arrangement of facts.

— Dr. BEALE pointed out some of the difficulties with which the Darwinian theory had to deal, more especially those vital tendencies of allied species which seemed independent of all external agents.

— Mr. LUBBOCK expressed his willingness to accept the Darwinian hypothesis in the absence of any

better. He would, however, express his conviction, that time was not an essential element in these changes. Time alone produced no change.

powerful arrangement of facts that had ever been given upon the subject, and expressed his willingness to accept his hypothesis in the absence of any better. He expressed his surprise at the Bishop of Oxford's reference to the Egyptian mummies, since to the naturalist as to the geologist, time was not an essential element in these changes. Time alone produced no change. (Cheers)  
The Rev. R. GRESWELL rose indignantly to oppose the assertion of Professor Huxley, that man was originally an atom of matter. He denied that he was ever an atom of matter. (Oh, oh, and loud laughter, amid which the rev. gentleman sat down.)

[Hooker's speech—the last—is identical in both versions]

The *Oxford Chronicle* account, unlike that in the *Athenaeum*, echoes the raucousness and rudeness of the exchange that is hinted at in other brief contemporary accounts as well as in much later recollections of people who were there. The Bishop's question, in this version, is set in the context of the point he was making about the differences between humans and animals, and rhetorically puts Huxley's grandparents in bed with apes—asking 'whether he would prefer an ape for his grandfather, and a woman for his grandmother, or a man for his grandfather, and an ape for his grandmother'. The blunt vulgarity of this version of the question suggests that Wilberforce had indeed been ill-mannered, an interpretation first made by an eye-witness, Frederick Farrar, in a note to Leonard Huxley.<sup>12</sup>

The secondary exchange between the two combatants is also interesting, because it has been entirely elided from the *Athenaeum* account, and also from historical memory. The Bishop, amid much applause, laughter and jeering, rises to reply to Huxley's answer at the outset of his speech, noting that he did not mean to offend, but had been 'tempted to it by the merriment of the audience, and it was merely a passing allusion'. This comment is corroborated by the recollections of William Tuckwell, who noted that, in his apology to Huxley, Wilberforce had claimed that the audience 'had laughed and that made him pursue the joke'.<sup>13</sup> Wilberforce then turns to reply to the attack Huxley had made with his reference to 'amateurs in science' making Darwin's hypothesis 'the occasion of appeals to passion and feeling'. Turning Huxley's point against him, he names several noteworthy scientific authorities who opposed Darwin (a point summarized at the end of Wilberforce's one speech in the *Athenaeum* account), provoking Huxley to reply that '[w]hat he had deprecated was authority like the Bishop's, authority derived from a reputation acquired in another sphere'. This move is also corroborated elsewhere: the *Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal*, in a brief and much reprinted summary, noted that Huxley had alluded to the Bishop as an 'unscientific authority'.<sup>14</sup> Here, Huxley is clearly doing the 'boundary work' in distinguishing science and religion, which several authors have noted.<sup>15</sup> Huxley's defence of the cultural authority of science against the claims of religion is of a piece with the efforts that Frank Turner has drawn attention to in his studies of Huxley, Tyndall and their allies.<sup>16</sup>

Joseph Hooker's closing speech strikes the same note. It is identical in both accounts. Hooker opens with a mild, humorous reproof to Wilberforce: 'the Bishop of Oxford having asserted that all men of science were hostile to Mr Darwin's hypothesis, —whereas he himself was favourable to it, —he could not presume to address the audience as a scientific authority'.<sup>17</sup> Obviously as a much published botanist and assistant director of the Royal Botanic gardens at Kew, he was a well-respected man of science, and his comment gently



shows the absurdity of the bishop's assertions about authority. The response is gentle in another sense as well: Hooker, unlike Huxley, does not rise to the bait with language unbecoming a gentleman of science. This accords with Hooker's general approach to scientific naturalism, which placed politeness over combativeness.<sup>18</sup> The impeccable tone, as well as the strong arguments, of Hooker's contribution likely explains why it required no change in the *Athenaeum* report. The speech was also warmly welcomed by the audience, according to the *Oxford Chronicle*, which records that '[t]he learned gentleman, during his address, was repeatedly cheered, and resumed his seat amid loud applause'.<sup>19</sup>

The debate becomes both more raucous and religious in the *Oxford Chronicle* account, with Wilberforce bristling with indignation at the 'most degrading assumption—(hear, hear)—that man, who, in many respects, partook of the highest attributes of God—(hear, hear)—was a mere development of the lowest forms of creation. (Applause)'. Huxley, in reply, protested 'against this subject being dealt with by amateurs in science, and made the occasion of appeals to passion and feeling. (Applause)'. Admiral Fitzroy, speaking here, begins to proceed to theological considerations and is shouted down, rather than simply expressing, as he does in the *Athenaeum*, his regret that Darwin's book was published and denying its logic. John Lubbock, later part of the X-club, is much more directly on Darwin's side in the *Oxford Chronicle* account than he is in the *Athenaeum*. Perhaps the most interesting character included in the *Oxford Chronicle* is the audience itself, raucous and engaged, taking an active part in encouraging their champions, and mercilessly shouting down lesser lights who were judged to be making irrelevant points. The importance of the audience is also reflected most clearly in William Tuckwell's memories of the event.<sup>20</sup> Hearing the cries from the boisterous crowd can help us imagine how an eloquent speaker might have been tempted to cross the boundaries of decorum for the sake of a good laugh.

Set side by side, it appears that the material absent from the *Athenaeum* account was excised from an original that must have looked much more like what appeared a week later in the *Oxford Chronicle*. It would seem impossible that the new details summarized above could be so seamlessly interpolated into the *Athenaeum* report. In addition to statements that are given in passing, there are numerous small details in the *Oxford Chronicle* that are readily provable. Wilberforce did open his speech by objecting to Draper's analogy between the stability of species and the immobility of a marble on a table, as Draper himself recalled in a letter written shortly after the event.<sup>21</sup> The clergyman who first speaks in the discussion was the polymathic Reverend Richard Greswell (not Cresswell—as misreported in the *Athenaeum*).<sup>22</sup> The *Oxford Chronicle* mentions a statistician named 'Dr. Bird': James Bird, MD, FRGS, was a medical man and statistician returned from a long Indian career, who had given a paper in the chemistry section on Thursday.<sup>23</sup> It would seem very unlikely that someone remembering the event after the fact would bother adding these kinds of minor details to the *Athenaeum* narrative.

The *Athenaeum* account must have removed details and speeches from an original much more like the *Oxford Chronicle* version. Some of this change may have followed from a need to shorten the report, but given the editorial decisions about what was removed, it is clear that there was a desire to prune controversial and indecorous material. This included personal attacks—Wilberforce's crude question and Huxley's sharp reply, as well as Huxley's insinuation that Wilberforce did not have the scientific authority or temperament required to address the matter. We know neither the circumstances that led to the production of these two versions of the discussions, nor their relationship to the original reporting that took place. However, we can guess at who wrote the two accounts and why they differed.

There would have been several reporters at the British Association meeting. Given the buzz that drew such a large crowd to Section D, several correspondents probably attended. One correspondent for *Jackson's Oxford Journal* complained that there were no provisions made for them as they struggled to cover speeches in crowded lecture halls.<sup>24</sup> A commentator on the BAAS meeting at Belfast in 1852 had noted that 20 reporters had covered the event, including men from the local press as well as several from the *Athenaeum*, and that they had pooled their efforts to improve their coverage.<sup>25</sup> While circumstances at Oxford may have been different, it is probable that correspondents co-operated in preparing their accounts. The most likely candidate to have taken a leading role in preparing the *Athenaeum* version is Edwin Lankester (1814–1874). As Frank James notes, he was a long-standing secretary of Section D, and he was also a contributor to the *Athenaeum*, where long and semi-official reports of British Association meetings regularly appeared.<sup>26</sup> His position indicates that the roles of journalist, man of science and BAAS official could be readily combined. In a letter of 6 July 1860, John Draper mentions that Lankester had asked him for a summary of his speech to include in the *Athenaeum*.<sup>27</sup>

Lankester may have written or compiled an original report, and been dissatisfied with the fact that some of the most telling details were edited out of the *Athenaeum*. This is conjecture in the absence of his papers, which are privately held. Lankester was a Congregationalist medical man and a popular writer and lecturer on health and natural history. In the early 1850s he had met Huxley in London and they had become close friends. They were both self-made men with medical training, and they had similar views on politics and the importance of science. Huxley had holidayed with Lankester's family, and they had celebrated Huxley's election as a Fellow of the Royal Society together.<sup>28</sup> Unlike his friend Huxley, Lankester was religious and his popular works on natural history are informed by his Christianity.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, as a dissenter he would have had no particular sympathy for the Bishop of Oxford.<sup>30</sup> Lankester's views on human evolution were conservative. In addresses on the origin of species he gave in 1861, he takes Richard Owen's position that the anatomical and behavioural differences between humans and apes argue against their common ancestry. However, in the same speeches, Lankester also urges the necessity of honest discussion in determining the truth; he claims that those who defended evolution did not have 'a design to oppose religion. Most of them believed that their own views were consistent with religion'.<sup>31</sup> It is clear that in 1860, Lankester was by no means an uncritical supporter of Darwin and Huxley; however, neither would he have supported the mocking approach of the Bishop of Oxford. As the secretary of Section D, he would have been responsible for preparing a report, and might well have been torn about how much of what was said could be published in the *Athenaeum*.

The debate was talked about, and the crucial exchange had already appeared in a number of newspapers in early and mid July as a pared down question and answer.<sup>32</sup> Given the attention, someone involved in the production of the British Association reports in the *Athenaeum* on 14 July decided to include enough of the discussion to reflect the basic disagreements between the two sides, but to flatten and censor it to remove the element of controversy which was distasteful to the organizers of the meeting. This interpretation is hinted at in a passing comment in the *Publisher's Circular* for 17 July, which noted that 'our journals have wisely softened down' the sharpness of the feud.<sup>33</sup> However, someone involved in the composition of the original report—Lankester himself or a local reporter he had worked with—seems to have felt that the full story was worth publishing, and supplied it to the *Oxford Chronicle*. This may have been because he resented the

bowdlerization of the discussion in the *Athenaeum*'s version, or perhaps because he saw an opportunity to sell the 'full story' to a local market, since the main metropolitan paper had cut it down drastically.

The *Oxford Chronicle* was a local, provincial weekly with liberal and anti-Tractarian leanings. It had been founded in 1837 by Henry Cooke in order to champion political and church reform, and maintained this orientation through the decades that followed.<sup>34</sup> It had been critical of the Bishop of Oxford for his kid-glove handling of a case of 'Romish' confession (tinged with sexual scandal) at the parish church in Boyne Hill late in 1858.<sup>35</sup> Like *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, it printed several pages about the British Association meetings in its 7 July and 14 July issues, covering many different speeches, noting who was at the evening conversaziones and offering details of discussions. The inclusion of this additional report on 21 July about the Section D meeting was exceptional, and seemed to be warranted by the 'animated and interesting' nature of the discussion. The liberal *Oxford Chronicle* may also have been a natural home for this report, given its antipathy to the Bishop of Oxford.

The movement of scientific conversation to print in periodicals has been the focus of considerable historical attention, with several scholars noting the importance of speech and performance in communicating the significance of scientific discoveries and arguments both to professional bodies and to popular audiences.<sup>36</sup> The British Association, from its inception a 'Parliament of Science', had a complex relationship to the nineteenth-century periodical press. While the body published its own annual reports, much of these involved organizational business, reports of scientific committees and transcripts of addresses by the annually appointed presidents of the sections and the president of the association itself. In the mid nineteenth century, abstracts of many papers that were read appear in the report, but some papers are recorded only by title and author. No details of conversations following papers are given. In the 1860 *Report of the BAAS*, Draper's talk appears as the same lengthy abstract that had first been published in the *Athenaeum*.<sup>37</sup> There is no reference at all to the talk that followed. The best access to the 'rational entertainment' of British Association discussions came through attending the sessions, which is surely why those discussions where scientific 'lions' or eloquent orators were likely to engage in entertaining and edifying controversies were so well attended.<sup>38</sup> There must have been a culture of oral performance at BAAS sections analogous to the 'platform culture' and 'speech spaces' that Diarmid Finnegan has called attention to in his analysis of scientific lectures in mid Victorian Edinburgh.<sup>39</sup> To those unable to attend, however, the only way of learning about the discussions apart from personal conversations, letters and gossip would have been through the local press, or through metropolitan papers.

This fact gives newspapers considerable power in shaping the public understanding of scientific conversation. As James Secord has shown, mid nineteenth-century newspapers not only reported on scientific discoveries, but by the nature of their coverage determined the credibility of experiments, such as those claiming that electricity could spontaneously generate life.<sup>40</sup> In effect, journalists and editors had the 'power to control the meaning of an experiment'.<sup>41</sup> They could also shape the public's understanding of the discussion that followed a scientific speech. As newspapers were the only public record of British Association discussions, journalistic decisions about what to include and omit would determine not only what readers understood about what was said, but also their views on the mood of a meeting, and the tenor of any disagreements. Given the *Athenaeum*'s importance, its decision to censor the Huxley–Wilberforce debate helped to ensure that it remained a subject for amused private gossip and did not enter the public sphere of print

as a controversy to be written up at length. The Huxley–Wilberforce debate in 1860 existed in print in a more marginal position than the central speeches and addresses of the British Association and although it was mentioned in a few of the literary quarterlies—Huxley’s response to Wilberforce was praised in *Macmillan’s Magazine* and condemned in the *Christian Remembrancer*—it existed in the English press as a minor event.<sup>42</sup> Kaalund has noted that the Huxley–Wilberforce exchange appeared in a number of newspapers, but it did so as a free-standing squib, or brief joke, not in the context of a description of the event.<sup>43</sup> The *Oxford Chronicle* version, appearing as it did only in one weekly provincial paper, could not reach the *Athenaeum*’s broader readership. The Huxley–Wilberforce debate’s life as a printed story was greatest in the late nineteenth century as private letters and recollections were brought into the public realm through the publication of the very popular *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin* (1887).<sup>44</sup>

However, the arguments, jokes and laughter that the *Athenaeum* omitted, and that old men and women much later recalled, were not simply retrospective embellishments, but central experiences which did not easily make their way into print in 1860. This newly rediscovered account from a few weeks after the meeting provides details which were removed from the *Athenaeum* version, and particularly preserves the combination of scientific and religious criticisms made by the Bishop of Oxford. It helps us to understand the way that both Huxley and Wilberforce addressed the central question of authority in science at that famous meeting. It also reveals that the *Athenaeum* account, which has been taken as authoritative by virtue of its length and visibility, was indeed ‘softened down’ or censored. There was a set-to in which a professor and a bishop were humorously rude to one another; one which overstepped the boundaries of polite debate. As one observer noted, ‘the proprieties of the Association have been outraged’.<sup>45</sup> Such harsh language as Wilberforce and Huxley had used did not belong in an official report. When Francis Darwin and Leonard Huxley wrote the biographies of their famous fathers many years later, they took up the encounter not so much to mythologize the conflict between science and religion, as to recover an aspect of the meeting which contemporary sensibilities had expunged from the most authoritative record of the discussion at the time.

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## NOTES

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- 4 Lucas, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 323.
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- 8 *Athenaeum*, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 19.
- 9 *Ibid.*
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- 11 Anon., ‘Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science’, *Oxford Chronicle and Berks and Bucks Gazette*, 21 July 1860, p. 3. Found in the britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk, British Library Board.
- 12 F. Farrer to L. Huxley, 12 July 1899, quoted in Lucas, *op. cit.* (note 2). On vulgarity in relation to Darwin, see also Gowan Dawson, *Darwin, literature and Victorian respectability* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).
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- 15 Hesketh, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 110; Thomas Gieryn, *Cultural boundaries of science: credibility on the line* (University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 45–46; Adrian Desmond, *Huxley: from devil’s disciple to evolution’s high priest* (Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA, 1997), pp. 279–281.
- 16 Frank Turner, *Contesting cultural authority: essays in Victorian intellectual life* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- 17 *Athenaeum*, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 65. As Lucas noted, Hooker exaggerates Wilberforce’s claim here in order to make his point; Lucas, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 323.
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- 19 *Oxford Chronicle*, *op. cit.* (note 11).
- 20 Tuckwell, *op. cit.* (note 13), pp. 52–54.
- 21 Ungureanu, *op. cit.* (note 7).
- 22 Greswell is identified by James, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 192. Greswell was an Oxford tutor sympathetic to Wilberforce. See James Burgon, *Lives of twelve good men* (Murray, London, 1888), pp. 291–306.
- 23 James Bird (1797–1864) was author of *The political and statistical history of Gujarat: translated from the Persian of Ali Mohammed Khan* (Bentley, London, 1835). His paper on Thursday 28 June was ‘On the deodorization of sewage’. See *Oxford Chronicle*, 30 June 1860, p. 5 (found in the britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk, British Library Board). Tuckwell also recalls the statistician and the audience’s impatience; *op. cit.* (note 13), p. 53.
- 24 Anon., ‘British Association’, *Jackson’s Oxford Journal*, 14 July 1860, p. 2.
- 25 Charles Frost, *On the prospective advantages of a visit to the town of Hull by the British Association for the Advancement of Science* (Goddard and Lancaster, Hull, 1853), p. 29.



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- 29 Edwin Lankester, *On food: being lectures delivered at the South Kensington museum* (Hardwicke, London, 1861), pp. 170, 255.
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- 31 Anon., 'Anniversary of the Worcester Natural History Society', *Berrow's Worcester J.*, 21 September 1861, p. 6. See also Anon., 'Dr Edwin Lankester's speech on the *Origin of Species*', *Coventry Herald*, 22 March 1861, p. 4 (found in the britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk, British Library Board).
- 32 Kaalund, *op. cit.* (note 5). An additional account of these reports is in preparation: Richard England, *Huxley and Wilberforce at Oxford and elsewhere: revisiting the early public history of a legendary event*.
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- 34 Anon., 'Address to the public', *Oxford City and County Chronicle*, 4 February 1837, p. 1; Anon., 'Death of Mr Henry Cooke', *Oxford Chronicle and Berks and Bucks Gazette*, 20 March 1869, p. 8 (found in the britishlibraryarchive.co.uk, British Library Board); *Waterloo directory of English newspapers and periodicals* ([www.victorianperiodicals.com](http://www.victorianperiodicals.com)).
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